

We claim:

1. A decoding protection method, for operating on information which is transferred through a medium and comprises main data which are to be decoded, the method comprising the steps of:

detecting protection data which are also transferred through said medium;

generating apparatus protection data which comprise at least first apparatus protection data and second apparatus protection data,

wherein said first apparatus protection data are specific to a region or a country in which said main data are to be decoded and are unmodifiable by a recipient of said main data and said second

apparatus protection data can be modified by the recipient to selectively define a plurality of protection levels including at least two levels which are respectively specific to adults and to children;

defining a protection level based on said protection data and on said apparatus protection data, in combination; and

executing decoding of said main data in accordance with said protection level,

wherein the combination of said protection data and said first apparatus protection data specifies that said main data are decoded either in their entirety or not at all, and the combination of said protection data and said second apparatus protection data specifies that said main data are decoded in their entirety, partially, or not at all,

wherein, for each combination of protection levels based on said medium protection data and said apparatus protection data, there is a corresponding range of one or more possible

values of final protection level, said corresponding range extending from a least severe value to a most severe value, and

wherein said data medium conveys both said medium protection data and said main data in an identical form.

2. A decoding protection method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said step of executing decoding of said main data comprises:

decoding said main data either in their entirety or not at all, in accordance with said combination of said medium protection data and said first apparatus protection data, and

decoding said main data in their entirety, partially, or not at all, in accordance with said combination of said medium protection data and said second apparatus protection data.

3. A decoding protection method in accordance with claim 2, wherein said step of executing decoding of said main data further comprises executing decoding of said main data in accordance with a value of final protection level between the least severe value and the most severe value in accordance with said combination of protection levels.

4. A decoding protection method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said step of executing decoding of said main data further comprises executing decoding of said main data in accordance with a value of final protection level between the least severe value and the most severe value in accordance with said combination of protection levels.